

B. J. 11. 102

A  
DESCRIPTION  
OF THE  
PAINTINGS

IN THE  
HALL OF OSSIAN,

AT  
PENNYCUK near EDINBURGH.



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" Quod fuit auditu gratum cecinere poetæ,  
" Quod pulchrum aspectu pictores pingere curant."

*Fresnoy.*

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**I**MAGINATION is the canvass of the poet, upon which, by the medium of language, his designs are raised and coloured. When, therefore, he successfully calls up a beautiful idea, or an interesting event, we immediately reflect how much our pleasure would be heightened, by seeing *these scenes or objects pass before our eyes*. To indulge this desire, to realize those ideas, is the province of the painter. By the magic of his pencil the canvass changes into the *Scene itself*; exhibiting to the eye what poetry presents only to the imagination.

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We immediately constitute ourselves judges of a poetical description of *our own Country*, or of an action in which we have been party or spectator : and that because we have *nature and truth* to compare with their imitation.

The *fancy* is easier deceived than the *eye*, and hence painting has always been considered as a *Criterion* of poetical merit, and a sure method of discerning Sound from Sense. The eye rejects at a glance whatever is unnatural or absurd ; and therefore Horace makes a picture of the faults in writing, that every person might at once detect by the eye those errors that had escaped their intelligence in the works of pretenders to the art (1). Poets and Historians approach more or less to perfection as they possess the power of making us *imagine we see* what they describe, with *our own eyes* : So he is the best painter who makes us *really see* what the true poet had only imagined. The ideas of the former will, by the aid of the Sister Art, not only appear grand, beautiful, and true, but the truth, beauty, and grandeur, will be impressed with all the energy of picturesque expressions, and heightened by the lights and graces of a second genius. Greece knew not her own Deities, till Phidias produced the Jupiter, and Ap-

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(1) “ Humano capiti cervicem pictor equinam

“ Jungere si velit, &c.

“ Spectatum admissi risum teneatis amici ?”

*De Arte Poet.*



pelles the Venus of Homer. These great masters were proud to acknowledge that they gave no more than visible form to the gods of the poet, whose sublime ideas, to be adored, needed only to be *seen* (2).

Poetry in all ages has not only acknowledged these obligations to her younger sister (3), but is often loud in her praise. What a compliment does Virgil himself bestow upon the powers of painting! Though Æneas in wandering from Troy had met several of his countrymen, nay even *the wife of Hector*, though he had related his misfortunes, and heard from her own mouth the story of her woes, yet his passions and feelings never seem truly roused, till struck by the paintings in the palace of Dido. Every figure, every circumstance in these drew fresh tears.

“ Tum vero ingentem gemitum dat pectore ab imo,  
 “ Ut spolia, ut currus, utque ipsum corpus amici  
 “ Tendentemque manus Priamum conspexit inermes.”

The merit of the Poet or Historian is not only judged by the same rules, but expressed almost in the same language with the works of

(2) “ Si Venerem Cous nunquam pinxisset Appelles,  
 “ Illa sub æquoreis merfa lateret aquis.”

(3) “ Our Arts were sisters, though not twins by birth,  
 “ For hymns were sung in Eden’s happy earth.”

*Dryden to Kneller.*



the pencil. Poverty of invention and vague idea in the one, is meagre composition and bad drawing in the other ; feeble expression is flat colouring ; indistinct description, a cloudy piece. But when either in a poem or a picture, the images stand strong, full, and well defined, the colour and expression animated, bold and harmonious, and the parts bright and distinct, the impression of genius is immediately acknowledged. Dryden was remarkably fond of this resemblance in the arts. His “ native “ fire” flames out upon the subject.” “ I cannot forbear (says he) giving one example to “ show what a master Virgil was in the knowledge and management of his colours. The “ Poet, speaking of Misenus the trumpeter, had “ said,

“ — Quo non præstantior alter,  
“ Ære ciere viros.

“ But in reciting before Augustus Cæsar, he “ broke off in the *hemistich*, or midst of the “ verse, and seized as it were with a divine fury, filled up the verse thus :

“ — Martemque accendere cantu.”

“ How *warm*, nay, how *glowing* a colouring “ is this ! In the beginning of the verse, the “ word *æs* or *brass*, was taken for a trumpet, “ because the instrument was made of that metal, which of itself was fine ; but in the latter

“ end which was made *ex tempore*, you see three  
 “ metaphors, *martemque,---accendere,----cantu.---*  
 “ Good Heavens ! how the plain sense is raised  
 “ by the beauty of the words ! It is the pencil  
 “ thrown luckily full upon the horse’s mouth, to  
 “ express the foam, which the painter, with all  
 “ his skill, could not perform without it.”

A poetical imagination being indispensably requisite to a good painter, and the profession of his own art disposing him to relish the beauties, and reject the faults in poetry, there is little danger of such an artist attaching himself to an indifferent or second-rate poet. No instance, it is believed, of this can be given. Hence *Homer*, *Virgil*, and *Ovid* have been always held the treasures of painting. *Tasso*, *Ariosto*, and *Dante* have also had the honour of employing the great masters of Italy ; and we are told that almost every scene and figure in the latter, were studied and designed by Michael Angelo himself (4).

Every intelligent reader of Milton and Shakespeare will feel himself strongly disposed to ac-

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(4) “ Et vous de nos secrets sublimes interprete,  
 “ Artiste eloquent, coloriste poete,  
 “ Apprenez aux mortel empresseés sur vos traces  
 “ Le pouvoir du genie et le charm des graces.”

*Art de Peindre, Wattelet.*



cord with the sentiment of the author of the Ode to the passions (5).

“ O could some verse with happiest skill persuade  
 “ Expressive picture to adopt their aid ;  
 “ What wondrous drafts might rise from every page !  
 “ What other Raphaels charm a distant age !”

The fate of old Ossian, seems to have been peculiarly happy. Upon the eve of being deserted by tradition his only preserver, and even by the language itself, the genius of M'Pherson interposed, received their charge, and gave him to the world.

Fortunate in a translator, the Celtic bard has been equally so in “ receiving his fame” from the taste and judgment of a critic, blest with every valuable quality of the character.

To compleat the honours of the Poet nothing was wanting but the attendance of the sister art. It was therefore with uncommon pleasure, that I lately heard of his being adopted by a native artist (6), under the patronage of a gentleman (7) distinguished by a fine taste and

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(5) Mr Collins.

(6) Alexander Runciman, born in Edinburgh, now master of drawing in the college of that city, appointed by the honourable trustees for the encouragement of arts, &c. lately returned from his studies in Italy.

(7) Sir James Clerk of Pennycuik, bart.



warm regard to the arts. The work, which is now finished, is the only *original performance* ever executed in Scotland.

The author of these pages, though he never touched the pencil, deems himself not the less qualified to offer to the public a description of the paintings in the hall of Offian, which he has more than once examined with attention: without pretending to anticipate the judgment of any person, he has presumed, with impartiality, to add what observations occurred to him at the time (8). An idea of the design will certainly be agreeable to many who view it; and he would at the same time willingly call some attention to an art, at present regarded by few at home, but from which this country has already derived, and promises to maintain no inconsiderable share of reputation (9).

Before describing the work itself, I must pray indulgence for two or three observes upon the

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(8) "Malheur aux productions de l'art dont tout la beauté n'est que pour les artistes." *D'Alembert.*

(9) Gavin Hamilton, Esq; is at present the first history-painter in Italy. Several young artists have lately given ground for considerable expectation; particularly Mr Jacob More, from Edinburgh, who has made a very surprising proficiency in landscape. It is yet uncertain what walk in painting Mr John Brown from Edinburgh may choose; but the abilities he appears possessed of, promise success in any of them; he is now in Rome.

nature of this undertaking, which I am entitled to say is a remarkable bold one ; because, of all poets, Ossian is perhaps the most difficult to be exhibited by the pencil. This will appear in the strongest light by recalling such part of the parallel between Homer and him, as immediately respects the art of painting. "Homer" (says Mr Pope) (10) not only gives us the full "prospect of things, but several unexpected peculiarities or side views, unobserved by any painter but himself." "The style of Ossian" (Dr Blair observes) is always rapid and vehement. In narration, concise even to abruptness, and leaving several circumstances to be supplied by the imagination. His images are given in a blaze of lightning which flashes and expires." Besides, it must be remember'd that the Celtic Bard uses little or no machinery, knows no religious ceremonies, is familiar only with a small number of natural objects, depends not upon ornament, and dwells in a continued wildness of landscape. Homer, on the contrary, not only invents, but disposes his figures. The artist has little to do but to follow his poet, and express at leisure those circumstances and images offered him from all the variety to be found in the universe, physical or moral.

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(10) Preface to the Iliad.



Invention therefore, the prime quality of the painter, is indispensable in Ossian's artist (11). He must not only seize the strongest impressions even in the rapidity of his poet, but supply upon the canvass what the other omits in the description. From Ossian he can have no more than one blaze of light upon the principal figures in the piece, and is left to his own imagination for all the other necessary circumstances and actors. These too must be conceived in the very spirit of the bard himself. They must stand their own ground upon the canvass, otherwise the painter's work will figure as ill in the picture, as a weak or ignorant interpolation would do in the poem.

From the beginning to the end of Ossian, a deep melancholy is preserved, often perhaps varied, but never remitted; no action or event is admitted, but such as are of an interesting and tragic nature. The Poet never forsakes his principal aim merely to please or to delight the imagination: he hastens to give the "joy of grief;" he aims at the heart by sublimity and tenderness of sentiment. Hence the painter is deprived of numberless advantages generally offered by the Muses. He can expect no support

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(11) " Illa quidem prius ingenuis instructa sororum  
 " Artibus Aonidum, et Phœbi sublimior æstu."

*Fresnoy*



from gay or smiling scenery, no play of imagination is to be depended on. A performance from *Homer* may be valuable from the beauty of the objects, the picturesque circumstances, the gaiety of the landscape, or some of those *peculiarities or side-views* touched by the Poet, though the grandeur or sentiment of the principal story be weakly expressed. Bassano, from poverty of idea, lost altogether the stories he meant to tell; but in return never failed to give a delightful landscape, filled with the most pleasing groupes of cattle and rural objects.

Confined therefore to the simple pathetic, the painter must succeed by the *action alone*: his figures must realize the ideas of the Poet; he must speak their language to the eye; in fine, he must occupy the vantage ground of his art, or drop all pretence to the character of poetical painting.

Had *Paulo Veroneze* executed the entry of *Alexander* into the tent of *Darius*, and attended as little to the invention as he did in the famous piece of the disciples at Emmaus, the splendour of his colouring, the grand effect, and all his other art, would not have preserved either the performance or himself from the heavy censure of degrading a noble subject. On the other hand, *Le Brun's* talents might not perhaps have produced so pleasing a picture in

the disciples at Emmaus, for the subject being in its nature less interesting, invention, expression, and costume (12) might not be equal in consequence to beautiful figures and splendid colouring. The eye alone being in such subjects concerned, and little work left for the understanding (13).

To the difficulty attending the just treatment of the interesting and pathetic, and the obvious advantages of the poet in this particular, it is perhaps to be attributed, that painters in general seem to have preferred subjects of a more indifferent nature. “ Annibal Carrache, “ (says Abbe Winkleman) instead of representing in the gallery of the Farneze palace, the “ noble exploits of the heroes of that illustrious “ house, confined himself to a trite set of subjects taken from the Pagan mythology. The “ royal gallery of paintings at Dresden (continues the Abbe) contains one of the noblest

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(12) The observance of dresses, arms, customs, and circumstances proper to the time, country, and persons represented. It is said that a Dutch painter, in the sacrifice of Isaac, put a gun in the hands of Abraham.

(13) In several fine pieces of the Venetian School, the story seems almost chosen only to affix a name to the piece. It was, therefore, with reason the French were offended at the partiality of the Nuntio *Delphini*, who, upon viewing the entry of Alexander, in presence of the Court and Le Brun himself, shrewdly (as he thought) observed, “ *Bella pittura, ma ha cattiva vicino*,” turning to the performance of his countryman Veronese.



“collections in Europe, and consists of capital  
 “productions of the greatest masters, chosen  
 “with the most exquisite taste, and most scrupulous  
 “severity. Yet how few historical  
 “pieces are there in this famous collection?  
 “and of those few, how rarely do we meet  
 “with the embellishments of a poetical imagination!”

Painters must, in some measure, be excused for devoting themselves to those subjects which give an evident superiority to their art. What a field of beauty does the judgment of Paris open to the profession! three naked goddesses displaying every conscious charm to dispute the prize of beauty. The pencil of a master thus employed, not only revells in a variety of the highest order of forms, but unites the whole in the successful goddess, and obliges the spectator to approve *the judgment of Paris*. In stories of this kind, every action and attitude speak immediately to the eye, and consequently must produce a more forcible effect than the finest description conveyed through the medium of words. On the other hand, tragic and sentimental subjects not only offer every advantage to the poet, but sometimes wholly exclude imitation by the pencil. Many operations of the mind are no doubt capable of expression by external acts, yet by far the greater part are followed by no certain alteration of feature or pe-



culiarity of attitude, and many of the finer feelings, though visible upon the countenance, are marked in a very dubious and uncertain manner. All these are under the command of the poet; he descends into the soul, and displays its nicest movements with a precision superior to what could be expected even from the window of the Grecian Sage (14).

A painting is properly no more than "muta poesis:" and therefore those subjects are undoubtedly the best suited to the pencil, which consist of motion, attitude, and expression alone, and where few or no words are necessary. Such are the action of Mutius Scævola, the terror of Attila, and the dreadful appearance of the writing on the wall to the King of Babylon. If such a story is not *well told*, the fault lies entirely upon the painter. On the other hand, where the subject seems only fitted for the pen, an artist observes, that the story *will not tell*. If he attempts it, notwithstanding, he only takes pains to exhibit the weakness of his art.

Hence in all poetical or historic paintings, where speaking figures are introduced, it is ab-

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(14) " En ressources fécond un auteur sur la scene  
 " Scait attendrir nos cœurs, par degrés nous enchaîne,  
 " Et preparant ses coups, pour les rendre certain  
 " Nous fait de son Héros entraîner les destins."

*L'Art de Peindre.*

olutely necessary that we should be acquainted with the story, and familiar with the characters or personages of the piece (15). When this is the case, we instantly animate the figure with the sentiments of the poet; and if the attitude and expression are just, strong and concordant, our ideas are returned with the embellishments of the painter, and impressed upon us with that delightful energy which constitutes the glory of the Art. “Ars enim cum a natura profecta fit, nisi naturam moveat ac delectet, nihil sane egisse videtur.” *Cic. de Orat.* ’Tis of such masterly painting Quintilian affirms, “Sic in intimos penetret affectus, ut ipsam vim dicendi non unquam superare videatur (16).”

It has been already observed that all Ossian’s

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(15) The old Gothic painters were in use to supply this defect with very little ceremony. They put labels in the mouths of their figures, and so made them speak: this practice is now in the sole possession of the engravers of political prints. The annexing however the words of the poet, or the circumstances of the story, to historical prints, is universally practised, and approved.

(16) We are told by the same author, that it was customary for prosecutors to exhibit to the judges, a painting of the crime in suit before them, to impress it the stronger upon their imagination. *George Alexander Stevens*, by a device of the same kind, viz. an agreeable use of pictures, busts and allegorical emblems, in delivery of his lectures, still continues to entertain the public. He speaks to and for all his figures, keeps up dialogues between them, and gives a kind of animation to the whole.



subjects are of the interesting and pathetic kind, and that they have little dependance upon imagery or description; it is chiefly by sentiment he commands our passions, always painting to the heart in preference to the fancy. Hence fewer subjects suited to the pencil are to be found in his works than is generally imagined, and those few are of the highest order, requiring all the energy of art, to express them *in the silent poetry of the eye*. So far as poetry is concerned, Dr Blair elegantly removes the objection to the uniformity of Ossian's imagery; he shows that the appearance of the object is always changed, suitably to the illustration for which it is employed. But this beauty cannot often be successfully imitated upon the canvass (17): and there remains another uniformity, still more difficult to surmount, which is the constant resemblance of tender and moving scenes to one another. Suppose the action and death of all the heroes and heroines in Tragedy were painted, there would not be very great distinction in the pictures. The variety is the creation of the poet, who is master of the numberless sentiments and feelings of the mind, while the painter has no other materials but the visible expressions of the passions, which comparatively speaking, are few and limited (18).

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(17) That part, or form of the image alone occurs to the imagination which suits the intention of the poet: in a picture the whole must stand before the eye.

(18) In the death of Germanicus, by Poussin; Agrip-

I cannot illustrate these observations better, than by considering those stories of Ossian, pointed out by Doctor Blair, as proper for the employment of a painter. The ruin of Balclutha is wonderfully fine. "The stream removed from its place by the fall of the walls: the thistle and the moss;" but above all, "the fox looking out from the window, and the rank grass of the wall waving round his head;" are the most picturesque circumstances imaginable. The picture notwithstanding would be no more than *a fine ruin*. In the poem this ruin only prepares us to receive the elevated and pathetic sentiments of Carthon. "Have I not seen (exclaims he) the fallen Balclutha? And shall I feast with Comhal? Comhal who threw fire in the midst of my father's hall. I was young, and knew not why the virgins wept. The columns of smoke pleased my eye when they rose above my walls. I often looked back with gladness when my friends fled above the hill (19). But when the years of

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pina covers her face with a handkerchief, "Et cela (says Mr Abbé Dubos) parce qu'on ne connoit pas toujours aisément *quel est la douleur des femmes, à la mort de leur maris.*"

(19) This passage would give a better picture. The terror of the people flying from the enemy, would admit of a strong expression, and might be finely contrasted, by the child smiling at the sight of the flames. Raphael in painting the burning of Rome, marks the horror of the scene, not by



“ my youth came on, I beheld the moss of my  
 “ fallen walls. My sigh arose in the morning,  
 “ and my tears descended with the night. Shall  
 “ I not fight, said I to my soul, against the chil-  
 “ dren of my foes? I will fight, O bard! I feel  
 “ the strength of my soul.” The effect of this  
 fine subject would be precisely reversed by the  
 different power of the arts. The Painting would  
 take its name and value from the *picturesque*  
*ruin*, and the figure be considered only as an  
*animating circumstance*. It would resemble the  
 famous landscape of *Poussin*, where the monu-  
 ment of a young shepherdes is introduced,  
 with the inscription, “ Et in Arcadia ego.”  
 These words attract the attention of a party of  
 dancers, and awaken in the mind of the specta-  
 tor a tender idea, even in viewing a luxuriant  
 scene of Arcadia, the subject of the picture  
 (20). The attitude of young Cormac, endea-  
 vouring to draw his father’s sword, and that of  
 Cairbar, upon the ghost of the murdered prince  
 rising in his soul, are no doubt fine *single fi-  
 gures*. Cairbar’s “ red eyes of Fear,” and his ac-  
 tion of throwing the javelin on the ground,  
 might strike in a picture, but the effect would

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the greatness or extent of the flames, but by the passions  
 and attitude of the people: the fire is only seen on the  
 back ground and side of the piece.

(20) Just such another fine subject is noticed by Mr Blair.  
 See Crit. dis. page 407. It is a landscape at sunset, enli-  
 vened by the appearance of an old warrior, and worthy  
 of the pencil a Titian, or a Rubens.

fall far short of the horrors of Richard the third, starting from his terrible dream (21). Neither is the action of Cormar sufficiently interesting as a principal; but it would afford a fine poetical embellishment, resembling the celebrated idea of the Greek painter, who in the marriage of Alexander and Roxana, introduced little Cupids sporting with the hero's helmet, and attempting to draw his sword (22).

It has been observed, that there are certain finer emotions of the mind, almost beyond the limits of the pencil. A striking instance of this occurs in Ossian. *Fingal* intending to send a detachment of his troops against the enemy, several chiefs present themselves, eager in expectation of being named to the command. "Some (says the poet) tell by halves their  
"mighty deeds. Before the rest the son of  
"Morni stood silent and grasped his sword. For  
"who had not heard of the battles of Gaul?  
"Filah could not boast of battles. At once he

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(21) See the print of Mr Garrick by Hogarth; almost the only instance of *the sublime*, in which that otherwise excellent painter has succeeded.

(22) " Les folâtres plaisirs, dans le sein de repos,  
" Les amours enfantins, désarmaient ce Héros :  
" L'un tenait sa cuirasse encor de sang trempée,  
" L'autre avait détaché sa redoutable épée,  
" Et riait en tenant, dans ses débiles mains,  
" Ce fer, l'appui du trône, et l'effroi des humains."

*Hen. Chant. Neuvieme. ver. 299.*



"strode away. Bent over a distant stream he  
 "stood. The tear hung in his eye. He struck  
 "at times the thistle's beard, with his inverted  
 "spear. Nor is he unseen of Fingal: Sidelong  
 "he beheld his son: He beheld him with  
 "bursting joy, and turned. He hid the big  
 "tear with his locks."

This is a *still scene* passing before the eye. The poet lays open the soul, and then describes the expression of the countenance. But where is the painter that will express those sentiments in the face, so as to tell the feelings of the soul? The expectation of the chiefs, and the conscious pride of Gaul, might be marked. Supposing too, the father's tears of joy successfully touched, yet what colour, what movement of feature, could express those noble tears of the modest *Filan*, flowing from the reflection that he had no battles to boast of! These I am afraid could not be distinguished from the expressions of grief so as to impress this heroic sentiment upon the spectator: I will not say it cannot be done, but I doubt much if Raphael himself would attempt it (23).

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(23) Supposing a picture of this subject attempted, the expression of the young hero, and perhaps of his father likewise, would be mistaken by spectators unacquainted with the story and characters, and hurtful to the idea of such as are familiar with them, because the eye would be

The preceeding reflections prevented a number of criticisms, occurring upon the first survey of the paintings from *Offian*, which I am since convinced would have been improper, and in a great measure unjust. The omission of many fine stories which in the reading appeared admirable subjects for the pencil: the want of *contrast* in those chosen by the artist: their uniform solemnity, though no regard had been paid to the order of the poems, or any connection of story kept up between them. I reflected upon the different method in which *Annibal Carrache* had treated the *Æneid* in the palace of Farneze, and did not see any reason why *Fingal* or *Temora* might not have been executed in the same manner. These and many such observes have been dismissed. I am now convinced the painter acted judiciously in chusing from the works of his poet in general, such subjects as could best be told by the pencil, without regard to connection. He was also right not to deviate from the simplicity of his subject in search of contrasts not to be found in their own nature. 'Tis the poet alone he has ventured to follow, refusing every aid derogatory to his spirit, whatever advantage they might promise from superficial approbation,

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presented with one or other of the emotions of grief, which has a different sentiment annexed to it. In fine, as already observed, the pencil would only labour to exhibit its own imperfection.



One remark however I cannot pass, because it struck me sensibly : the moment I entered the apartment now termed *the Hall of Ossian* : the eye is at once dazzled by the splendor of gold and colour, reflected from the bright frames of the other paintings round the sides of the room, and by the rich ornaments covering the divisions of the ceiling ; all which, by means of a strong light, renders the whole smiling and brilliant. This is an *allegro to a tragedy*, the reverse of that " key-note struck by the poet." I have often found the solemn airs, and wild simplicity of the Eolian harp an excellent *overture* to reading the works of Ossian, and it is perhaps by sound alone the gaiety of this beautiful apartment can be corrected, and the mind tuned at once to unison with the subject (24). I soon however learned, that no idea of the paintings since executed, entered into the original design, but had been adopted after the ceiling was finished, and ready for the pencil. After some attention this effect goes off, and will leave the spectator in a proper disposition to examine the work itself.

A large oval fills the center of the ceiling,

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(24) " But the wild harp that to the blast complains,  
 " Sooth'd with melodious plaint her raptur'd ear;  
 " Deep, solemn, awful roll'd the varying strains,  
 " Such strains as seraphims with transport hear."

*Ogilvie's Elysium of the Poets.*

which is closed by four angles. Each compartment contains a picture, and the remainder are disposed immediately below in a *volto*.

The first piece, (in which the figures are large as life), occupies the oval in the center. It is taken from a passage of Fingal, book third.  
 “ Daughter of the hand of snow, I was not so  
 “ mournful and blind when Everallan loved  
 “ me. Whoever would have told me then,  
 “ when I strove in battle, that blind, forsaken,  
 “ and forlorn, I now should pass the night, firm  
 “ ought his mail to have been, and unmatched  
 “ his arm in battle.” (25).

The painter here calls up in person the venerable bard himself. We see him seated with a large harp between his knees, the eyelids shut, his face turned upwards pouring out the song, while with extended arms he strikes the instrument in all the vehemence of poetic rapture. A spectator can scarcely avoid supplying the words, “ firm ought his mail to have been, and “ unmatched his arm in battle.” The countenance, though deeply furrowed by time and sorrow, carries the dignity, the freshness of age, it denotes a soul unimpaired by years. The wind blowing aside his robe, discovers the body of the Bard, and marks his attention to the song;

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(25) Before surveying the work, the painter gave me the passages of Ossian, from which his pictures are taken.



while the deep insertions of the large muscles, tell us what he was "when Everellan loved him." In the opposite groupe appears Malvina the mistress of Oscar, to whom the song is addressed. She leans with one arm upon the knee of an attendant placed a little above. The expression of the face and attitude, is a fixed, noble, melancholy attention; her eyes are half shut, she seems lost in the song, "in the tales of other times;" her dress comes over part of the head, embracing with simplicity and ease the whole body, and discovering not only the shape, but every turn of a finely formed person (26). This drapery is not ideal; I am told it is the *araisaig* yet known in the Highlands; Malvina's is pure white; for she fondly considered herself the widow of Oscar. Her companion leans upon one arm rested on the knee, and pays that kind of attention commonly given to a mournful tale: by her left hand thrown round the neck of Malvina, she seems chiefly to feel for her share in the misfortune of the story.

Closs to Ossian a Culdee bent with age, reclines his head upon a staff, clasped with both hands for support, and stands in deep attention to the song. At his side is a soldier resting upon

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(26) I cannot help thinking that the idea of this figure is taken from the Agrippina, in the capitol collection at Rome, though the action is altogether different.

a long spear, with eyes full of respect and admiration directed to the Bard.

Near Malvina, a beautiful youth stands erect, his hands clasped upon his breast; his head reclined. The expression of the whole figure is graceful and pathetic. He seems to lament his being born so late, and feels the power of the song, with all the enthusiasm and tenderness of his susceptible age. Indeed this figure is executed *con tanto amore*, that I could not help regarding it as a principal in the piece. At his side, and in the same group, are two lovely young girls, whose attention and feeling suit their age, contrast their attitudes, and give additional softness to the scene. Another girl still younger, seems to call off the attention of one of these, by pointing upwards with her hand—The artist, not satisfied with elevating the action of his principal figure, by attention, silence, and feeling, in their varieties of age, sex and character, contrives here to diversify the scene, by such machinery as the poet affords him. This solely consists of the ghosts of departed heroes, supposed to ride in the clouds, and to be delighted with the songs of Bards. “Let Car-  
“ril (says Ossian) pour his song, that the Kings  
“may rejoice in their mist. The awful faces  
“of other times look from the clouds of Crona.” The painter, I say, seizing this grand circumstance, has thrown the clouds into a variety of fantastic forms, bearing some resemblance of hu-



man shapes and attitudes. Probability is not destroyed by *real* faces or figures stooping from the sky ; but such forms are described, as the clouds in that climate often naturally assume, and which perhaps gave birth to the wild mythology of the times. It is to these, the young girl, the last figure I mentioned, is pointing with her finger. They are just discovered by a chief in armour, behind the women. He is stretching out his arms in an enthusiastic posture, and seems plainly to behold the spirits of his ancestors, assembled to "hear the voice of their fame." At a little distance appears a fine *silenzio*, one of those actions which *paint best* and *tell worst*. It is a young boy clambering upon his mother, with intention to make her look up: she, afraid of his disturbance, by a frown on her face, and a finger on her lip, orders him to silence. On the other side a young girl, with her back to the spectator, is engaging the attention of an old soldier, by pointing to the same phenomenon. The turn of the body, and the flow of the drapery, greatly contribute to produce a graceful figure. At each end, common men, in various coloured garments, are pointing and gazing in contrasted postures, full of superstitious wonder. The scene is a sea shore, under a large rock ; part of a high craggy coast runs off from the eye, and between the groups, *sea views*, *tall ships*, and *old castles* are discovered.

I have attempted a description of this piece,

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as the best compliment to its merit. Were I to find fault, I would say, that the idea of Ossian blind, forsaken and forlorn, is hurt by the number of figures attending upon him. That the posture and expression of the youth, strikes the spectator even in preference to *Malvina*, whose position removes her too much to one side; and that there is a lustre, a tone, in the colouring not concordant with the *harp of the poet*, and which the painter would have done well to have preserved in the effect.

At the north end of the room is a battle piece, taken from the first book of *Temora* (27).  
 “ Behold they fall before my son like the groves  
 “ in the desert, when an angry ghost rushes  
 “ through night, and takes their green heads in  
 “ his hand. Cairbar shrinks from Oscar’s sword,  
 “ and creeps in darkness behind his stone. He  
 “ lifted up his spear in secret, and pierced my  
 “ Oscar’s side.”

The painter has here chosen what the poet would have wished. *Young Oscar* is the hero of the battle, and appears in the centre of the piece. He firmly opposes his shield in one hand, and with the other launches a javelin against the enemy. The figures in opposition are fighting,

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(27) Cairbar invited Oscar to a feast in Ireland, with intention to assassinate him, and therefore began the quarrel by demanding the spear of *Temora*, which the other refused.



but fighting with reluctance. Those at a distance seem struck with terror at the slaughter of their friends. A tall stone is near, and Cairbar stooping behind it, is just pushing his spear into Oscar's side. Olla the bard is seen raising the song of battle, and the ground is covered with dead and wounded in various and natural positions.

The moment of time is admirably chosen for the subject of painting. We see the brave young Hero bearing down a treacherous enemy, with the most exalted valour. But the eye no sooner fixes upon the gloomy Cairbar, than we feel in part, what Malvina did at the song. "Daughter of Toscar (breaks off the Bard) why that tear? he is not fallen yet." (28) There is an admirable firmness in the position of Oscar, and a calm expression of determined bravery in his countenance. Every circumstance in Cairbar marks the villain. His posture is that of a coward, and Envy in every feature seems to direct the blow. Oscar is rather slightly armed. The "short brown shaft" put in his hand by the artist seems very unequal to the slaughter made, and answers not to the formidable spear of Temora, given him by the poet. Indeed it must be owned, the action of throwing a javelin gives a bet-

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(28) Nothing can exceed the tenderness and beauty of this passage. Malvina's tears begin to flow at the very time the Bard was describing her lover victorious.

ter opportunity of exhibiting to advantage the animated and masculine figure of the young warrior, than could be had by making him fight with the long spear. His drapery is *red*, and thrown about his shoulders in the mode which the Highlanders still use ; it flows gracefully behind, partaking of the forward motion of the body, and leaves the *naked* for the artist to show his skill in a vigorous movement, and bold expression of the muscles.

I am not pleased with Olla the bard ; there is something defective in the figure : his eyes, and hands thrown up, give the idea of a *Grecian priest in prayer to the Gods*, not that of a *Celtic bard singing to combatants*.

Directly opposite at the south end of the room appears

#### The DEATH of OSCAR.

“ We saw Oscar on his shield ; we saw his  
 “ blood around ; silence darkens every face ; each  
 “ turns his face and weeps ; the King strives to  
 “ hide his tears.” (29) This piece seems to be executed in the spirit of the poet ; Oscar lies upon his shield, where he had thrown himself to save it from the enemy, and his favourite dog Bran howls at his feet ; his friends are crowding around ; Ollian the father has covered his head

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(29) Temora, book first.



in an agony of grief (29); Fingal is distinguished by the grandeur of his deportment. The expression is noble, and suits the elevation of his character; "He strives to hide his tears." Before Oscar stands a *Culdee*, who seems to view him with a mixture of pity and horror; pity to his virtues, and horror at his expiring in infidelity (30). A soldier behind, stands astonished to see his leader on the ground. Oscar seems to have forgot himself, and feels for his friends. The "melting of the soul" is pathetically expressed, and forms altogether a most affecting, and deeply tragic scene.

There is a peculiar propriety in the colouring of these two last paintings. In the first, the bright red of Oscar's drapery, is the *prime tint* of the piece, and gives a vivacity to the whole. Oscar *there* appears *alive* and *victorious*. In the next *he is fallen*; the colour is in the very tone

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- (29) "Sæpe etiam extremos querentem effingere motus  
 " *Defecit ars, genioque negat pigmenta rebellis.*  
 " Hinc mutanta via est. Pictorem imitare Pelasgum,  
 " Qui pavidam Atridæ natam dum sisteret aris  
 " Mærentes inter proceres, patruumque, patremque,  
 " Desperans tantos pingendo attingere luctus  
 " *Occuluit velo vultus prudente paternos,*  
 " Et tacuit solers qua reddere tela negabat."

*Pictura, Carmen, auctore Marsy.*

- (30) The Culdees were the first Christians in Scotland.

of the poet, *dark brown and melancholy* (31); "Silence darkens every face." The truth of this poetical expression is here agreeably proved; for in sorrowful silence, the head naturally reclines, and the countenance *falls into shades*.

#### DEATH of AGGANDECCA.

Starno King of Norway intending to murder Fingal, allured him to that country, by a promise of marriage to his daughter. She discovered her father's design to Fingal. The picture calls up the catastrophe of this story; the idea of which is taken from the third book of Fingal. "Bring hither (says Starno) Aggandecca, to her lovely King of Morven. She came with red eyes of tears; she came with her loose and raven locks; Starno pierced her side with steel: she fell like a wreath of snow that slides from the rocks of Ronan. Fingal eyed his chiefs; his valiant chiefs took arms; the gloom of battle roared."

The gigantic Starno appears in the centre, with a sword in his right hand, just drawn from his daughter's side. He eyes Fingal, and with horrid triumph points to the fallen Aggandecca. She is sinking into the arms of an old nurse, and half surrounded by a groupe of women, in

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(31) The colour of a picture should instantly denote the nature of the subject.

" 'Tis not enough no harshness gives offence;

" The sound must seem an echo to the sense." *Pope.*



various attitudes of astonishment, fear and affection. Her brother Swarn stands behind, thunder-struck at the fate of his sister. On the left hand Fingal is drawing his sword in a transport of anguish; his soldiers behind are seizing their arms, and pressing forward to support him. On the other side a Norwegian strikes with his spear a shield hanging on a tree, *the alarm of war*. The soldiers of Starno a little farther off, are advancing at the signal, and prodigious mountains, covered with snow, rise in the back ground.

This piece I acknowledge to be my peculiar favourite. The attitude and dreadful gloom of Starno; his arm remaining in the very line of the blow; the other pointing to the sacrifice he had made: the air of the head, the Herculean body armed in plates of brass, strike with a terrible idea of the fierceness, the cruelty and pride of the barbarous Norwegian: these ideas are carried to the utmost by the object of his revenge, the lovely fallen Aggandecca, "The fairest maid that ever neaved a breast of snow," now expiring under the eye of her lover. The idea of the poet is exquisite. "She fell" (says he) like a wreath of snow, that slides "from the rocks of Ronan." The figure has flowed from the pencil of the artist, *under equal inspiration*. She has just sunk from the stroke, preserving, in a delicate turn of the body, the

fine wave of a wreath of snow ; the resemblance to which is completed by the pure white simple drapery, folding around her. The fond anguish of the old nurse supporting Aggandecca, is strongly marked ; a lady her attendant holds up one of her arms, pressing it to her bosom and lips ; another appears to weep bitterly, covering her face with her hands ; another just recovering from the astonishment of the action, kneels with every feature full of pity and affection, forming a beautiful and affecting groupe. Fingal, by the expression in his face, and manner of drawing the sword, seems to be *wounded through his Aggandecca*. No circumstance can be more natural than the Norwegian striking the shield : the effect and bustle created by this in the distant figures, the tremendous mountains, the country of the “ King of Snow,” complete a scene which would not dishonour the judgment of *Poussin*, or the expression of a *Domenichino*.

A HUNTING-PIECE from Cathloda, Duan II.

“ Many a hero came to woo the maid ; the  
 “ stately huntress of Tormoth wild : but thou  
 “ look’st careless from thy steps, high-bosomed  
 “ Strina Donna.”

She has just let fly her arrow with an exulting air : and seems to think her shaft alone fatal to the boar. Another maid her companion, is drawing the bow, and taking aim with a fort



of fearful eagerness. One of the lovers is receiving the animal in front, upon his spear, to show his courage, the other aims a blow at him with a sword from behind a tree, to prove his dexterity.

The hunting of Nymphs is a beautiful and favourite subject of the pencil, because it gives a field for all the luxuriance of fancy.

“ Ecce suo comitata choro Dictynna per altum,  
“ Menalon ingrediens.”——

The painter here has wisely checked this luxuriance, and kept to the simplicity of his poet. *Strina Donna* is indeed a stately figure. The contour is grand, and the flexible muscles are softly expressed; like the Atalanta of Ovid, “ Virgineam in puero, puerilem in virgine posses.” (32) She looks careless from her steps. “ Cede superba ferarum.” The two rival brothers are here supposed hunting the boar with their mistresses. That animal was the game of the country, her father being termed *the hunter of boars*. The landscape of this picture is admi-

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(32) “ ——Nemorisque decus Tegeæa Lycæi.  
“ Rafilis huic summam mordebat fibula vestem:  
“ Crinis erat simplex, nodum collectus in unum:  
“ Ex humero pendens resonabat eburnea lævo  
“ Telorum custos. Arcum quoque læva tenebat.  
“ Talis erat cultus, facies quam, dicere verè,  
“ Virgineam in puero, puerilem in virgine posses.”

*Ovid. Met. lib..*

rably executed, and the colour warm, glowing, and harmonious.

Fingal in an expedition to Scandinavia, finds Corban Carblafs, whom Starvo had bound to a rock. "Who art thou, voice of night? (said "Fingal) She trembling turned away." (33) This is a moon-light scene. "A moon-beam" (says the poet) glittered on a rock. In "the midst stood a stately form, a form with "floating locks." The figure of the lady presents the idea of the poet full to the eye. Her hair and white drapery flow in a gentle breeze, and the light of the moon gives the figure a fine relief: the attitude is formed by her situation. Her arms are stretched down, and her hands clasped before, like a person desponding. Her head is turned from Fingal; the air and features full of grief and shame, which seems to occasion a gentle endeavour to get free from her bonds. Fingal makes a pleasing contrast: His drapery is green and black, the light falls behind him. He is supposed to have discovered Corban Carblafs, and stands in amazement, just before saying, "What art thou?" The tinge of the picture is grey, and the landscape a large rock, and an old ruined castle.

Offian abounds in the pathetic; and his painter has chosen for the subject of the next piece,

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(33) Cathloda, Duan 1st.



## GELCHOSA mourning over LAMDERG.

He had fallen at her feet, after killing his antagonist in combat. "And sleepest thou so soon  
 "on earth, O chief of shady Cromla? Three  
 "days she mourned beside her love." (34) Gelchosa sits under the gloom of a hanging rock: at a little distance is a rushing torrent, which adds to the melancholy of the piece. Her hands are clasped: Her hair dishevelled, flying in the wind; and her eyes fixed upon the dead body at her feet. "The Hunters (says the poet) found  
 "her dead."

"The grief that does not speak,

"Whispers the o'er-fraught heart, and bids it break."

*Shakespeare.*

Though the mournful lady seems well imagined, yet I own this piece does not please me. There is something harsh and disagreeable in the effect. The body of Lamderg has nothing beautiful left in death: it is rather ghastly and terrible, to which the fore-shortning of the figure adds very much. *Tasso*, in his discourse upon heroic poetry, gives the following advice to poets, which painters likewise would do well to consider with attention: "Dee scegliere il poeta cose gratissime alla vista et a gli altri sensi, e schivar quelle che sono, spiacevoli ad alcun di loro."

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(34) Fingal, book 3d.

## OINA MORUL.

She serenades Ossian in her father's hall: in soft music acquaints him with her affection for the chief of Sandronlo, and tenderly requests the release of her lover, then his captive. "In the hall I lay at night: soft music came to my ear. It was the maid of Fuarfed wild: She raised the nightly song: For she knew that my soul was a stream, that flowed at pleasant sounds." The light of this picture, soft as the subject, comes from a lamp. There is a sweet simplicity in the air and figure of Oina Morul; and her fine attitude is formed by the tender feeling of her situation. In reality she "looks a voice," and Ossian hears with a deep and pleased attention.

Monsieur *Felibien*, like a true Frenchman, makes a very anxious apology for Alexander the Great, not *bowing low enough*, upon entering the tent of Darius, in the painting of Le Brun. "Il ne pouvoit pas (dit il) *se baisser beaucoup*, a cause que dans le dernier combat, il avoit este bleffe a la cuisse" (35). The painter of Oina Morul stands much more in need of an apology, for bringing this lady into Ossian's apartment at midnight. In the poem, we can suppose many circumstances

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(35) Description du peintures faits pour le Roi,



to take off this effect. But in the picture, the nearness of the figure is somewhat striking. Perhaps by making Oina Morul venture so far, he intends to heighten the compliment to the virtue of Ossian, who immediately resigned her; "though loveliness with a robe of light, cloathed the daughter of many isles."

To this succeeds a different and terrible scene indeed, *viz.*

CORMAR attacking a Spirit of the Waters.

"Winds drive along the clouds. The lightning flies on wings of fire. He feared and came to land. Then blushed that he feared at all. He rushed again among the waves to find the son of the wind. Three youths guide the bounding bark. He stood with the sword and shield. When the low-hung vapour past, he took it by the curling head, and searched its dark womb with his steel. The son of the wind forsook the air." (36) This wild exploit makes a noble picture. The stormy sky, the tempestuous sea, the waves dashing over rocks, and the bounding bark, are executed with force and nature. The light is only a less gloom, opening to discover the action of Cormar, who with one hand eagerly grasps a dark shaggy cloud at the head of the vessel, and with the other plunges his sword into it. In this

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(36) Fingal, book third.

cloud is discovered something of an unshapely form, and horrid feature, to express "the son of the wind," shrinking from the blow. The colouring is a reflection of nature; but the painter does not seem sufficiently acquainted with the management of a vessel *upon canvass*. Cormar is robust, and highly animated. His posture and face mark a determination to revenge the affront received, upon this spirit, with more resolution than was shewn even by Achilles himself, in his combat with the river God Scamander (37).

Another scene deeply tragic presents itself to the eye. Cairbar, lord of Atho, murders Cormac, the young king of Ireland, at a feast in Temora, the Royal Palace.

"Why comest thou in thy arms to Temora,  
 "Cairbar of the gloomy brow? He past on in  
 "his darkness, and seized the hand of the king.  
 "Cormac foresaw his death." (33)

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(37) "Oft as he turned the torrent to oppose,  
 "And bravely try if all the powers were foes,  
 "So oft the surge in watery mountains spread,  
 "Beat on his back, or bursts upon his head,---  
 "When thus, his eyes on heaven's expansion thrown,  
 "Forth bursts the hero with an angry groan;  
 "Is there no god Achilles to befriend?  
 "No power t' avert his miserable end?" *Pope's Iliad*.  
 (38) Temora, book first.



The young Prince is sitting in the midst of the hall on a seat raised from the ground. Cairbar is stepping up, seizing him with one hand, and aiming a murderous blow with the other. On either side, a number of old bards and women are flying in all the variety of terror and astonishment. The harps are falling to the ground, and confusion and uproar on foot.

It is impossible to imagine a more terrific figure than that of Cairbar. The bold contour and high swelling muscles; the red hair, dreadful visage, and horror of the action, are wonderfully heightened and contrasted by the youth, beauty, and well expressed innocence of Cormac. The painter here has only the chance of a moment, and one stroke to produce his effect; the poet we know has many (39); how much therefore in viewing this piece, is our feeling encreased, by recalling the beautiful position in which the youth had before appeared! his weak endeavour to draw the sword of his father: and upon the noble salutation given his murderer the moment preceding, "Hail, mighty stranger, art thou of the friends of Cormac?"

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- " (39) Le peintre moins aidé dont on exige autant,  
 " Pour parvenir au cœur, n'a jamais qu'un instant:  
 " Il doit, tout à la fois, se montrer et séduire;  
 " Convaincre sans parler, frapper avant d'instruire:  
 " Il n'a point ce récit, au besoin toujours prêt  
 " Qui sur le temps passé cimente l'intérêt." *Wattelet.*

I am unable to convey in words the terror of the women flying off on both sides, or do justice to the boldness of their figures, and variety of their attitudes. One of them having a grown child clinging round her, turns not her back like the rest, but, with all the mother in her face, stretches out her arms to preserve her offspring; terror and astonishment appear among the bards and guests; and yet what is highly admirable, the character and rank of each remains conspicuous in their passion. The same thing is observable in the variety of the draperies displayed in this piece: they are light and substantial, narrow or broad, according to the different ages of the women, and rank of the bards and others present.

The ceremonies of religion enrich and dignify the works of a painter: these are altogether wanting to our artist; his poet had no religion, but he describes some part of the superstition of his neighbours, and thence is given us a picturesque representation of

SCANDINAVIAN WIZARDS making their incantations.

Near are two circles of Loda, with the stone of power, “ where spirits descend by night in  
“ dark red streams of fire: *there* mixed with  
“ the murmur of waters, rose the voice of aged



"men; they call the forms of night to aid them  
"in their war (40)."

The landscape is exactly that of the poet: a roaring torrent and high broken rocks around: in these rocks the painter has opened a large dark cave: before the mouth of it stands the image of Loda, a black unshapely Gothic figure; round the image, within a circle, a number of skulls and bones ly scattered: five old wizards in distorted frightful attitudes are howling around. A dismal light is thrown upon this groupe, from the fiery streams, and uncouth ghostly forms, issuing from the cave, and hovering in the sky: bats and owls flutter on each side, and over the neighbouring torrent, the full moon is seen rising in blood.

The wild execution of Salvator Rosa might have added to the merit of this performance, but it could have had no more from his invention. It must be noticed, at the same time, that the painter has entirely mistaken the figure of the circle of Loda; it was not described round the image in a continued line, but consisted of a circle of tall rough stones fixed in the ground at certain distances, including space sufficient for a number of worshippers: Such are the remains

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(40) Sullmalla of Lumon.

of them in several places of this island, particularly in Orkney, the scene of the poet (41).

The horrors of Loda did not in the least intimidate the hero of the poem. Accordingly in the next piece, the painter has followed the poet even on this dangerous ground, and ventured to represent

The ENCOUNTER of FINGAL with the Spirit himself.

To render the formidable shape of death, as given by Milton, visible, would be a bold attempt. (42) The spirit of Loda seems likewise exceeding difficult; that being appears of a prodigious size; his hair streaming in meteors; a wild voluble projection of form; a dismal assemblage of feature, with broad shadows, and sheets of cloud waving around, compose a most tremendous, and yet an obviously *aerial* spectre. Fingal in a noble posture receives him unterrified; an elevation of soul shines in the figure,

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(41) Vide a print of these circles in Wallace's description of Orkney.

(42) " The other shape,  
 " If shape it might be call'd, that shape had none,  
 " Distinguishable in member, joint or limb,  
 " Or substance might be call'd, that shadow seem'd,  
 " For each seem'd either; black it stood as night,  
 " Fierce as ten furies, terrible as hell,  
 " And shook a dreadful dart."



and his courage is of that sedate quality, which distinguishes the character of true heroism. "The spirit of Loda (according to the poet) shrieked as, rolled into himself, he rose upon the wind."

This solemn work is judiciously closed by the erection of a rude monument to the old bard: "The four stones amidst the withered grass; the narrow house of the warrior."

Three robust bold figures are pushing up one of the stones with amazing strength; and, at a distance, some others, chiefs of rank, are attending the ceremony in solemn sadness.

The painter, in the labouring figures, has displayed great knowledge in anatomy; the joints are firmly knit, and the muscles flexible and strong: great as the stone is, they appear plainly equal to the task; at least, I am not able to discover any wrong placing in the muscles: Besides the singular boldness of the drawing, the swelling contours, and concordant actions of the whole body, as by him described, raise an idea of corporeal strength, which, I apprehend, can only result from truth in the imitation: upon any other principle I presume not to use the word *anatomy*. If I would have wished an addition to any of these pieces, it would have been of Dante's old Oak, to this:

“ Spargendo a terra le sue spoglie eccelsee,  
 “ Mostrando a l' fol la suo squalida stirpe.”

Ornaments were necessary to fill up the angles of the ceiling, and compleat the whole. “ Such spaces, (Mr Pope well observes), (43) are left to be decorated at the discretion of the painter, with foliage, architecture, grotesque, or what he pleases; yet his judgment will be still more commendable if he contrives to make even these extrinsical parts to bear some allusion to the main design.” The ornaments contrived by Ossian's painter for this purpose, are the four rivers of Scotland, in allegory.

To the Tay, he gives the epithet, Overturner of Woods.

To the Spey,

Tamer of Bulls.

To the Clyde,

Protector of Ships.

To the Tweed,

Divider of Kingdoms.

These river gods appear to be executed in the style of Michael Angelo: The bold contours, and strong carnations of the Herculean figures, give the ceiling a grand effect, the distinguishing character of such work.

The Spey sits in a storm, enjoying the rapidity of his waters, roaring along the rocks and woods; the last of which bear the marks of his devastations.

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(43) Shield of Achilles.



The Tay, in size and strength a perfect Milo, seems to number and guard the numerous herds feeding upon his banks, which the painter supposes *remarkable for the breed of cattle.*

The Clyde, leaning on an oar, contemplates with great satisfaction the arrival of ships in a large bay, intended, no doubt, *for the basin at Greenock.*

The Tweed, with prodigious force, pushes asunder the land on either side, making way for his waters to *divide the kingdoms.* The action of this figure brings immediately to remembrance the much admired thought of Raphael, who painted the river Jordan holding back his waters with his own hands, to allow a safe passage to the Children of Israel.

The mechanic rules of painting are but seldom and lightly touched in the preceding description: their application to each particular piece conveys no ideas to those unacquainted with the terms of art, and becomes tedious even to such as are. 'Tis only the work itself which can afford satisfaction in these respects.

I have endeavoured chiefly to do justice to the *invention* of this artist; because that is within the power of description, and every person may thence be enabled to judge whether he has suc-

ceeded in a choice of his subjects ; whether he has happily united the most suitable, grand, or pathetic circumstances attending the action ; whether these are elevated and embellished ; or, in one word, whether he is, or is not possessed of a poetical imagination (44).

If this shall be given in his favour, he promises to rank high in the profession (45), at least it will be his own fault if he does not : because industry and care are capable of surmounting every other difficulty ; but the first must be born with the painter. The Dutch have produced more artists, excellent in the inferior or mechanic department, than all Europe besides. Their works too, are more equal among themselves, because being possessed of equal industry, they attained almost to perfection, in following that low and common nature which requires no real genius to imitate (46).

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(44) " Ordinary nature in a picture is almost equally dull as common narration would be in a poem." *Richardson.*

" To express any one passion justly, is a certain proof that an artist is possessed of a lively imagination, but to be able to express a number of different and contrary ones, all of which have been conceived by the creative power of his own fancy, is an infallible indication of a genius truly original." *Essay on Genius.*

(45) " Ista, labore gravi, studio monitisque magistri,  
" Ardua pars nequit addisci rarissima.-----

" Non uti Dedaleam, licet omnibus ire Corinthum." *Fresnoy.*

(46) " In homely figures even the Dutch excell ;  
" Italians only can draw beauty well." *Buckingham.*



In *disposition* likewise, this work has a great share of merit. Some of the groups indeed appear heavy, but many more light and pleasing to the eye. At the same time, I cannot help thinking the painter seems intentionally to have transgressed, or overlooked some of the rules in this branch. It is certainly to be wished that he had paid more regard to the triangle, which, without all question, is a beautiful form. The stones, and labouring figures in the last picture, are a fine instance of its superiority, and I should not have been displeased to have met with more frequent instances of the same kind (47).

Faults in the drawing may, in several places, be pointed out, though I acknowledge some of them, upon examination, seem rather to carry the appearance of poetical licence. In general this artist possesses a bold, flowing and masterly line, suited to subjects of grandeur and effect. Contrary to modern practice, (48) he seems fond

(47) Disposition is the arrangement of figures and images into groupes pleasing to the eye. The triangle is preferred from its lightness and variety. *Vide Analysis of Beauty.*

“ Il nous apprend a faire avec détachement,  
 “ Des groupes contrasté, un noble agencement,  
 “ Qui du champ, du tableau fasse un juste partage  
 “ En conservant les bords un peu léger d'ouvrage,  
 “ N'ayant nul embarras, nul fracas vicieux,  
 “ Qui rompe ce repos si fort ami des yeux.”

*Moliere. Pla fond du Val de grace.*

(48) “ Poets like painters thus, unskill'd to trace  
 “ The naked nature, and the living grace,

of the *naked*, and loves to dwell upon masculine figures, where bold and strong expressions are required. 'Tis to be hoped he will guard against this stile, in softer subjects, and eazel pictures; if not, it will give them a hardness to any eye, but especially to such as are accustomed to the "touches moeleux" of the Dutch and Flemish (49).

In colouring none will refuse him the highest merit, who have seen the beauty and relief of this work. The chromatic part seems to be easy and natural to his pencil. The carnations are well varied in the *nude*, and the tints in general finely smoothed and blended. Sometimes in the distant parts, he has ventured them bright and distinct (50); and I will venture to say,

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"With gold and jewels cover every part,

"And hide with ornament their want of art." *Pope.*

(49) Their performances are often to be met with, and the taste for painting with many people, is entirely modelled upon them.

(50) "Du fini précieux, de la touche rapide,

"Le choix peut arrêter: que la place en décide

"Dans l'espace moins grand que l'œil voit de plus près

"Un pinceau caressé doit fondre tous les traits:

"Mais, d'un vaste Palais pour enrichir la voûte,

"Par un vol plus hardi, frayez vous une route."

*Wattelet.*

"Pigmenta in tabulis quanquam variare jubemus,

"Concordes tamen usque tonos decet esse colorum;

"Haud secus appositae sociat quam musica voces

"Absumilesque sonos discordi fœdere jungit."

*Pittura, Carmen.*



that the work described would be highly valuable, had it no other merit than the colouring, and the *chiaro oscuro*, which, from every part, plays agreeably upon the eye. (51)

The draperies are mostly proper and sentimental, though rather carelessly executed : they preserve the form of each member entire before the eye ; and either spread in noble and gradating folds, or loosely embrace the body in lesser and graceful ones.

Le Brun himself could not have been more scrupulous in the *costume* : The natural appearance of the country is always retained in the landscape ; no arms or dresses are to be seen, but those authorized by the poet, or by tradition ; neither is any ornament introduced foreign to the subject, or hurtful to the simplicity of Offian. That his studies have been employed, and his taste formed upon the antique is visible, from that respectful eye, he seems continually to have held upon it : he has exhibited no servile copies of particular parts, but transfused the style

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(51) A well-disposed picture, in which the lights and shades, or *chiaro oscuro*, are properly managed, is agreeable to the eye even at that distance in which the figures are not discernible. Observe such a picture when day-light is going off, the parts will vanish from the eye, exactly as the objects represented would do in nature.

and manner into the whole. For nothing is more certain, as Michael Angelo well observed, than that "*chi non fa far bene da se, non può servirsi bene; delle cose d' altri.*" (52)

I since learned upon good authority, and am well pleased to conclude, by informing the public, that if this artist shall do honour to himself or his country, the merit is solely due to the *worthy proprietor of the Hall of Ossian*, and to *Robert Alexander, Esq;* merchant in Edinburgh: To this gentleman, it is certain, his country owes more for the countenance and support of rising genius, than to the whole body of her nobility.

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(52) Vafari. Vit. Michel Agnolo.

T H E E N D.



